

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An information providing apparatus comprising:
  - storage means for storing information, relevant information which is relevant to the information, and features of the information for each category of the information;
  - acquiring means for acquiring information to be searched for;
  - determining means for determining a category to which the information acquired by said acquiring means belongs;
  - extracting means for extracting features of the information acquired by said acquiring means;
  - comparing means for comparing the features of the information which belongs to the category determined by said determining means with the features extracted by said extracting means, the former features being stored in said storage means; and
  - searching means for searching for the target relevant information stored in said storage means based on the result of the comparison performed by said comparing means.
2. An information providing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the category has a hierarchical structure.

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3. An information providing apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said determining means determines the category based on a digital watermark, the digital watermark being inserted in the information acquired by said acquiring means.

4. An information providing method comprising the steps of:

storing information, relevant information which is relevant to the information, and features of the information for each category of the information;

acquiring information to be searched for;

determining a category to which the information acquired in said acquiring step belongs;

extracting features of the information acquired in said acquiring step;

comparing the features of the information which belongs to the category determined in said determining step with the features extracted in said extracting step, the former features being stored in said storing step; and

searching for the target relevant information stored in said storing step based on the result of the comparison performed in said comparing step.

5. A recording medium having a computer-readable

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program implementing a method comprising the steps of:

storing information, relevant information which is relevant to the information, and features of the information for each category of the information;

acquiring information to be searched for;

determining a category to which the information acquired in said acquiring step belongs;

extracting features of the information acquired in said acquiring step;

comparing the features of the information which belongs to the category determined in said determining step with the features extracted in said extracting step, the former features being stored in said storing step; and

searching for the target relevant information stored in said storing step based on the result of the comparison performed in said comparing step.

6. An information providing apparatus comprising:

acquiring means for acquiring information to be stored;

determining means for determining a category to which the information acquired by said acquiring means belongs;

inserting means for inserting a digital watermark in the information acquired by said acquiring means, the digital watermark corresponding to the category determined by said determining means;

7. An information providing method comprising the steps of:

- acquiring information to be stored;
- determining a category to which the information acquired in said acquiring step belongs;
- inserting a digital watermark in the information acquired in said acquiring step, the digital watermark corresponding to the category determined in said determining step;
- storing the information in which the digital watermark is inserted in said inserting step; and
- delivering the information stored in said storing step via a network.

8. A recording medium having a computer-readable program implementing a method comprising the steps of:

- acquiring information to be stored;
- determining a category to which the information acquired in said acquiring step belongs;
- inserting a digital watermark in the information

acquired in said acquiring step, the digital watermark corresponding to the category determined in said determining step;

storing the information in which the digital watermark is inserted in said inserting step; and

delivering the information stored in said storing step via a network.

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